

How do media talk about the Covid-19 pandemic? Metaphorical thematic clustering in Italian online newspapers

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BACKGROUND and MOTIVATION

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Semino 2008): Metaphors as **COGNITIVE phenomenon**

CMT used to describe socioeconomic and health crises (Sontag, 1990; Besomi, 2019)

"(...) in the media, metaphors often are used to popularize and condense complex issues" (Hellsten, 2000:214)

→ The use of metaphors helps frame complex issues, but often hinders aspects that do not fit with the metaphorical representation chosen

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the major themes discussed by the Italian press in the first months of the pandemic outbreak?
2. Do themes in the press change with the shift from Phase 1 (Feb 24 – April 26) to Phase 2 (April 27 – June 2)? If yes, when did this shift happen?
3. Can we identify networks of metaphors pertaining to the identified themes?

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

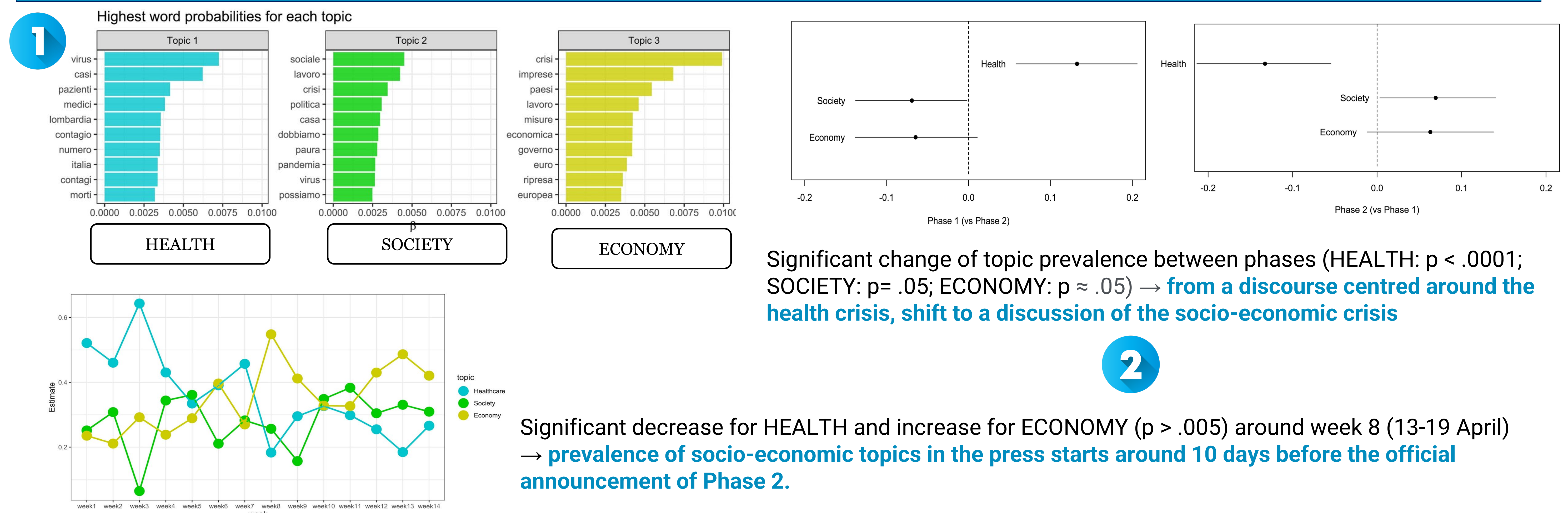
DATA:

- ❖ Corpus of online news articles (**430K words**), Phase1 and Phase2 subcorpora (300 and 211 articles each)

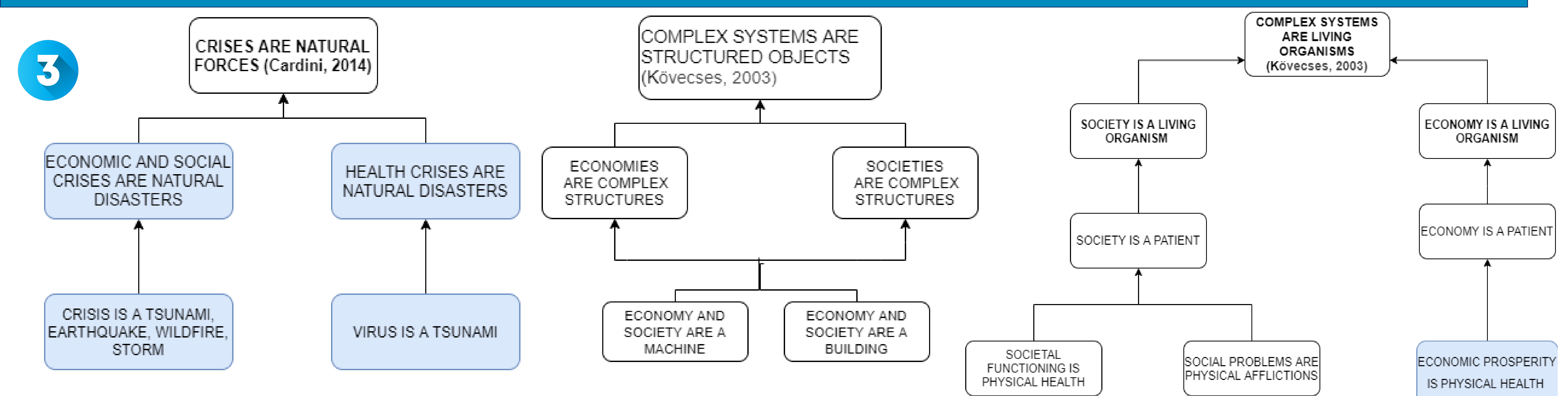
METHODS:

- ❖ Structural Topic Modelling (STM) +
- ❖ corpus-based metaphor retrieval and qualitative analysis

STRUCTURAL TOPIC MODELLING



METAPHORS OF THE COVID CRISES



- ❖ Same metaphor, different meaning: **VIRUS IS A TSUNAMI** (*The infectious disease specialist: "It was a tsunami, now it has become a small wave"*) vs **CRISIS IS A TSUNAMI** (*After Coronavirus, the tsunami of the economy*)
- ❖ Health both as a source and target domain
- ❖ Economy and Society represented as (sick) living organisms or (collapsing) structures

